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## Consumers' Negative Electronic Word of Mouth: Non-complainers, Bad-mouthers, Dissatisfied Complainers, and Satisfied Complainers

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**Introduction** Current literature on negative electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) points out that spreading a dissatisfying purchase experience on the Internet is a public action, and it can occur without redress-seeking (Sparks & Browning, 2010). Some consumers immediately turn to retailers' websites or review websites to post negative reviews without contacting the retailer to seek remedies, redress or restitution. However, it is necessary to encourage consumers to seek redress so that the retailers receive opportunities to address and solve the issues (Blodgett & Anderson, 2000). Therefore, the purpose of the study is to identify factors influencing customers' redress-seeking and negative e-WOM behaviors. Following previous studies (Blodgett & Anderson, 2000; Grégoire, Salle & Tripp, 2015), this study identified four types of dissatisfied consumers (i.e., non-complainers, bad-mouthers, dissatisfied complainers, and satisfied complainers) based on possible predictors (i.e., level of dissatisfaction, perceived likelihood of successful redress, perceived time effort and cost in seeking redress, brand switching cost) and compared and contrasted these consumer groups.

**Literature Review and Hypotheses** Blodgett and Anderson (2000) suggested three types of dissatisfied consumers based on their complaining behaviors: consumers who do not seek redress (non-complainers), consumers who are satisfied with the company after successful redress (satisfied complainers), and consumers who are even more dissatisfied with the company after unsuccessful redress (dissatisfied complainers). Grégoire et al. (2015) pointed out, bad-mouthers, who do not seek redress but spread negative e-WOM, are particularly bad because they spread negative WOM without any prior warning or giving the retailers opportunities to fix the issues. Prior studies have shown that dissatisfied consumers who perceive a high likelihood to succeed in seeking redress, a sufficient level of dissatisfaction, and a low level of required time and effort are more likely to seek redress (Blodgett & Anderson, 2000; Richins, 1983; Singh, 1988). Thus, we hypothesized that consumers who sought redress would have a higher level of dissatisfaction (H1), perceived likelihood to succeed (H2), and a low perceived cost in seeking redress (H3) than consumers who did not seek redress. In addition, WOM literature indicates that a high level of dissatisfaction and a high perceived switching cost increase consumers' intent to engage in negative e-WOM (Blodgett & Anderson, 2000; Tronvoll, 2007). Therefore, it is posited that consumers who spread negative e-WOM would have a higher level of dissatisfaction (H4) and a high level of perceived brand switching cost (H5). Also, satisfied consumers whose needs were met during a redress-seeking process are more likely to have favorable attitudes and behavioral intentions toward the retailers (Blodgett & Anderson, 2000; Singh, 1988). Thus, it is posited that satisfied consumers would perceive a higher positive service recovery justice than dissatisfied consumers (H6) and would show a higher repurchase intentions than other consumer types (H7).

**Methods and Results** A survey of consumer shopping experience was conducted to test the hypotheses. 162 responses from MTurk panel collected via a self-reported questionnaire were analyzed. Measurements were modified from previous studies on a 7-point Likert scale to test our hypotheses. Out

of 162 participants, there were 22 non-complainers (13.4%), 40 bad-mouthers (24.4%), 43 satisfied complainers (26.5%), and 57 dissatisfied complainers (35.2%). The two-way MANOVA showed that consumers who sought redress perceived a higher likelihood to succeed in seeking redress ( $F=8.83$ ,  $p<.01$ ) and lower perceived time effort ( $F=5.02$ ,  $p<.05$ ) than who did not seek redress. Thus, H2 and H3 were supported but H1 was not. Consumers who spread negative e-WOM reported a higher level of dissatisfaction ( $F=4.38$ ,  $p<.05$ ) than consumers who did not spread negative e-WOM. So, H4 was supported but H5 was not. In terms of brand switching cost, non-complainers showed the lowest level of brand switching cost ( $M=2.24$ ) and bad-mouthers and satisfied consumers showed a higher level of brand switching cost ( $M=3.28$ ) than other types ( $F=6.57$ ,  $p<.05$ ). The t-test showed that satisfied consumers had a higher service recovery justice than dissatisfied consumers ( $t=2.47$ ,  $p<.05$ ), supporting H6. Finally, the one-way ANOVA and the Duncan post-hoc test showed that satisfied consumers had the highest repurchase intentions than other types ( $F=3.13$ ,  $p<.05$ ) supporting H7.

**Discussion and Implications** This study confirmed that likelihood to succeed and perceived low time effort and cost in seeking redress were important factors influencing consumers' decision to seek redress. The level of dissatisfaction did not influence redress-seeking, but influenced the decision to engage in negative e-WOM. The result implies non-complainers and bad-mothers considered redress-seeking was a hassle. However, non-complainers perceived the lowest brand switching cost. Thus, they are more likely to choose alternatives instead of going through the hassle to redress. On the contrary, because bad-mouthers had a high brand switching cost, they are likely to be in a hostage relationship with the retailer and spread negative reviews. In addition, our results showed that unsatisfying redress-seeking produced no difference between dissatisfied consumers and consumers who did not seek redress (non-complainers and bad-mouthers) in terms of purchase intentions. As we expected, satisfied consumers who obtained a successful redress were the most desirable consumer type. This study extended the existing negative WOM literature to a wider negative e-WOM context by suggesting and testing a comprehensive overview of dissatisfied consumers' responses based on seeking redress and spreading negative e-WOM behaviors. The results of this study will provide important insights for retailers and service providers. By understanding the underlying factors driving redress seeking and negative e-WOM, practitioners will be able to develop effective methods for managing and tending to dissatisfied consumers.

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